

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 659

By Herron

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Professor Robert Belton
of Vanderbilt University.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Professor Robert Belton, Esquire; and

WHEREAS, Robert Belton was an exemplary public servant and consummate professional who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens in numerous capacities; and

WHEREAS, an accomplished attorney and distinguished scholar, Robert Belton was a nationally recognized legal expert on labor and employment and civil rights law who won landmark cases before the United States Supreme Court and then shared his legal knowledge and expertise at Vanderbilt School of Law for thirty-four years before retiring in 2009; and

WHEREAS, a native High Point, North Carolina, Robert Belton rose from humble beginnings as the fourth child of a laborer whose family ultimately numbered eighteen children;

WHEREAS, although offered a full scholarship to Morehouse College, Robert Belton chose to reside for a year after high school with a sister living in Connecticut and eventually enrolled at the University of Connecticut; and

WHEREAS, after receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Connecticut in 1961, Robert Belton pursued a legal education at Boston University where he obtained his Juris Doctorate in 1965; and

WHEREAS, exhibiting the legal talents that would garner him national acclaim, Robert Belton served from 1965 to 1970 as assistant counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc., for which he headed the national civil rights litigation campaign to enforce what was a new federal law prohibiting discrimination in employment; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Belton played an integral role in the landmark Supreme Court case, *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, litigated by the Legal Defense Fund, and was highly involved in other

groundbreaking civil rights cases decided by the Supreme Court, including *Albemarle Paper Co. v. Moody*, which addressed damages in civil rights cases, and *Harris v. Forklift Systems*, which addressed sexual harassment; and

WHEREAS, in 1970, Robert Belton became a partner with the law firm of Chambers Stein Ferguson & Lanning in Charlotte, North Carolina, one of the first racially integrated law firms in the South; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Belton and his colleagues demonstrated great courage as the building owned by the firm was fire-bombed at the height of its involvement in a series of landmark civil rights cases, including *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education*, in which the Supreme Court approved busing as a remedy to enforce the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Belton joined the faculty of Vanderbilt Law School in 1975 and was the first African American to be granted tenure there; and

WHEREAS, Professor Belton became a popular and beloved teacher and mentor, as well as a leader among other African American faculty as they worked together on equality issues at Vanderbilt; and

WHEREAS, the faculty sponsor of the Black Law Students Association, Mr. Belton played an important role in mentoring minority and other law students and greatly enjoyed actively working with all Vanderbilt students interested in social justice, including the sponsor of this resolution who was inspired by Professor Belton; and

WHEREAS, the author of numerous law review articles and book chapters, Robert Belton was an expert in employment discrimination law and was the lead author of a widely adopted casebook on the issue that was the first to incorporate critical race and feminist theory; and

WHEREAS, Professor Belton served greatly in the classroom where he excelled in teaching the Law of Work, Employment Discrimination Law, Constitutional Tort Litigation, and Race and the Law; and

WHEREAS, an active member of the Vanderbilt community, Mr. Belton served on a number of law school and university committees, including the Faculty Senate, the Committee

on the Status of Women and Minorities, the University Research Council, and the Black Cultural Center; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Belton also served on the Executive Committee of the American Association of Law Schools and the National Employment Lawyers Association, was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity (the Boule), and the 100 Black Men of Middle Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Robert Belton was a visiting professor at Harvard Law School and the University of North Carolina, the first Distinguished Charles Hamilton Houston Visiting Professor of Law at North Carolina Central School of Law, and the recipient of the American Association of Law Schools' Minority Section's Clyde C. Ferguson Award in 2003 and the National Bar Association's Presidential Award in 2006; and

WHEREAS, devoted to his family, Mr. Belton is survived by his beloved wife, Joy; his two devoted children, Keith and Alaina; and two treasured grandchildren, Savannah and Kelsey; and

WHEREAS, Robert Belton leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, seldom do gentlemen of his stature walk among us, and it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional attorney, resolute public servant, and extraordinary human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Robert Belton, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mr. Belton.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.